Word formation

1 Compounds

A Compound nouns

A compound noun can be formed by joining two nouns together, e.g. hand + bag = handbag.

- a handbag
- the weekend
- football
- a guidebook
- my bedroom

We stress the first part of the word: a ‘handbag.

There is little difference between a compound noun and two separate nouns used one after the other, e.g. a phone bill. Some combinations can be written either as a compound or as two separate nouns, e.g. guidebook or guide book.

Some compound nouns are formed from an adjective + noun or from a verb + noun.

- a greenhouse
- a blackboard
- some workmen
- a searchlight

Note

Compare these phrases.

- Compound noun: a ‘hotplate (= a place on a cooker where you heat food)
- Adjective + noun: a hot ‘plate (= a plate which is hot)

B Gerund + noun

We can use a gerund to classify a noun, to say what type it is or what its purpose is.

- the dining-room (= the room for dining in)
- a washing-machine (= a machine that washes clothes)
- a sailing-ship
- some writing-paper
- a swimming-pool
- the booking office

We often use a hyphen after the gerund. We stress the gerund, e.g. the ‘dining-room.

Note

Compare a gerund and a participle.

- Gerund: a ‘sleeping-pill (= a pill that helps you to sleep)
- Participle: a sleeping ‘child (= a child who is sleeping)

C Noun + gerund

We can form a compound with a noun + gerund.

- Taxi-driving was what I ended up doing.
- We had three days of sightseeing.
- Coin-collecting is an interesting hobby.

We stress the noun, e.g. ‘coin collecting.

The noun in this pattern is singular, e.g coin-collecting. But after a gerund the noun can be either singular or plural depending on the meaning.
Driving a taxi was what I ended up doing. Collecting coins is an interesting hobby.

D Compound modifiers

We can use a number + noun to modify another noun.

- a three-day visit
- a sixty-mile journey
- a car with four-wheel drive

The noun in this pattern is usually singular, e.g. a three-day visit.

The modifier can also be a number + noun + adjective.

- a three-day-old baby
- a hundred-metre-long queue

We can also form compounds with participles.

- a road-widening scheme
- a hard-boiled egg

2 Prefixes

A A prefix is something that we can put at the beginning of a word to change the meaning. Compare these two sentences.

I calculated the amount I would need.

I miscalculated the amount I would need.

(= I wrongly calculated the amount I would need.)

Here the prefix mis- (= wrongly) changes the meaning.

B Here are some prefixes and some examples of words we can form with them.

- anti- (= against) anti-nuclear protestors, anti-social behaviour
- auto- (= self) an autobiography, auto-suggestion
- co- (= together) co-exist, a co-production, my co-driver
- ex- (= previously) his ex-wife, an ex-footballer
- inter- (= between) an inter-city train, an international phone call
- mini- (= small) a minibus, a minicab
- mis- (= badly/wrongly) misuse, misbehave, miscount, a misprint
- mono- (= one) a monorail, monolingual, speak in a monotone
- multi- (= many) a multinational company, a multi-storey car park
- out- (= more/better) outnumber the opposition, outplayed their opponents
- over- (= too much) overweight, an overgrown garden, ill from overwork
- post- (= after) the post-war years, a post-dated cheque
- pre- (= before) the pre-war years, preheat an oven
- pro- (= in favour of) pro-government forces, pro-European policies
- re- (= again) re-write a letter, remarry, the resale value of the car
- semi- (= half) semi-precious stones, reach the semi-final
- sub- (= under/less) the subway, subnormal intelligence, sub-zero temperatures
- super- (= big/more) a superstar, a superhuman effort, a supersonic aircraft
trans- (= across)       a transatlantic flight, a heart transplant operation
under- (= too little)   undercooked food, an underused resource,
                         underpopulation

NOTE
Out- and under- can have a literal meaning: underwear, the Underground, underline a word; an
outbuilding, an outdoor pool, the outskirts of the town.

C There are some negative prefixes meaning ‘not’.

un-      feeling unhappy, an unfair decision, unhealthy conditions,
         high unemployment, unplug a machine, unpack a suitcase
in-      an independent state, an inoffensive remark, the invisible
         man, an incurable disease, a terrible injustice
il- (+ l) an illegal act, an illogical argument
im- (+ b/m/p) an imbalance, an immoral act, immature behaviour,
             an impossible situation, an impractical dreamer, wait
             impatiently
ir- (+ r) an irrational fear, an irresponsible attitude
dis-     a dishonest statement, a violent disagreement, disappearing
         out of the door, a dislike of flying
non-     non-alcoholic drinks, non-stop entertainment,
         a non-smoking area
de-      defrost a fridge, the depopulation of the countryside,
         the decentralization of government

We do not use in- before b, l, m, p, or r. We use il-, im-, and ir- instead.

3 Suffixes

A Introduction

A suffix comes at the end of a word. For example, we can add the suffix –ness
 to the adjective kind to form the noun kindness. Compare these two
sentences.
  We won’t forget how kind you’ve been.
  We won’t forget your kindness.
Here the use of the suffix to form a noun makes the sentence shorter
and neater.

Sometimes the addition of a suffix involves other changes in the form or
pronunciation of the word.
  apply ➔ application
  possible ➔ possibility
  courage /'kərɪdʒ/ ➔ courageous /'kərɪdʒəs/
Changes in pronunciation can involve both sounds and stress. For example, when we add -\textit{ous} to \textit{courage}, the stress changes from the first to the second syllable.

\textbf{TIP}
Not all combinations of words and suffixes are possible. For example, we can add -\textit{ment} to some verbs to form \textit{statement}, \textit{amusement}, \textit{punishment}, and so on. But we cannot add -\textit{ment} to every verb. The possible combinations have to be learned as individual words.

\section*{B Abstract nouns}
Here are some ways that we can add a suffix to a verb or adjective to form a noun – usually an abstract noun.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textbf{Verb $\rightarrow$ noun ending in -\textit{ion}}
  \begin{itemize}
  \item correct $\rightarrow$ correction,
  \item discuss $\rightarrow$ discussion
  \item produce $\rightarrow$ production,
  \item describe $\rightarrow$ description
  \item inform $\rightarrow$ information,
  \item invite $\rightarrow$ invitation
  \item add $\rightarrow$ addition,
  \item repeat $\rightarrow$ repetition
  \item decide $\rightarrow$ decision,
  \item permit $\rightarrow$ permission
  \end{itemize}
\item \textbf{Verb $+$ -\textit{ment}}
  \begin{itemize}
  \item development, government,
  \item movement, payment
  \end{itemize}
\item \textbf{Verb $+$ -\textit{ance/-ence}}
  \begin{itemize}
  \item acceptance, performance; 
  \item existence, preference
  \end{itemize}
\item \textbf{Verb $+$ -\textit{ing}}
  \begin{itemize}
  \item a building, my feelings
  \end{itemize}
\item \textbf{Adjective $+$ -\textit{ness}}
  \begin{itemize}
  \item blindness, forgetfulness, illness,
  \item sadness
  \end{itemize}
\item \textbf{Adjective in -\textit{ant/-ent} $\rightarrow$ noun in -\textit{ance/-ence}}
  \begin{itemize}
  \item distant $\rightarrow$ distance,
  \item important $\rightarrow$ importance
  \item absent $\rightarrow$ absence,
  \item silent $\rightarrow$ silence,
  \item violent $\rightarrow$ violence
  \end{itemize}
\item \textbf{Adjective $+$ -\textit{ty/-ity}}
  \begin{itemize}
  \item certainty, royalty; nationality,
  \item stupidity
  \end{itemize}
\end{itemize}

\section*{C Driver, student, tourist, etc.}
There are a number of endings that we use to express a person's role.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textbf{Noun/Verb $+$ -\textit{er/-or}}
  \begin{itemize}
  \item builder, driver, footballer, interviewer, lawyer, owner, 
  \item smoker, walker, writer > Note a 
  \item editor, navigator
  \end{itemize}
\item \textbf{Noun/Verb/Adjective $+$ -\textit{ist}}
  \begin{itemize}
  \item journalist, motorist, nationalist, tourist
  \end{itemize}
\end{itemize}
D Friend, waitress, policeman/policewoman, etc

Most nouns for people can mean either a male or a female, so a friend, a student, a doctor, a motorist, etc. can be either a man or a woman.

My friend has sold his car. (a male friend)

My friend has sold her car. (a female friend)

If we need to specify what sex, we add another word, e.g. her boyfriend, female students, women doctors.

Some words for family members are different for males and females, e.g. husband/wife, father/mother, son/daughter, brother/sister, uncle/aunt. But a cousin can be male or female.

We can add the female suffix –ess to some nouns. A prince is male, and a princess is female. Other examples are hostess and empress. But be careful not to over-use –ess. Where there is a word that can refer to either sex, e.g. manager or poet, it is old-fashioned and may be seen as sexist to use manageress or poetess. The only jobs where –ess is still regularly used are actress and waitress, although actor can refer to either a man or a woman.

There is also a male suffix –man /mən/ and a female suffix –woman, e.g. businessman/businesswoman, chairman/chairwoman, policeman/policewoman, salesman/saleswoman, spokesman/spokeswoman. But these are now often regarded as sexist, and words that can refer to both males and females are preferred. Sometimes we use the suffix –person, e.g. the chairperson, a salesperson. Or we use a different word, e.g. a business executive, a police officer, a sales representative.

NOTE

Some adjectives of nationality end in –man/-woman, e.g. Frenchman, Irishwoman. > 6B

E Verbs

There are many verbs in –ize formed from adjectives with an abstract meaning. We can also add –en to some adjectives with a concrete meaning.
Adjective + -ize: centralize, legalize, modernize, popularize, privatize
Adjective + -en: brighten, harden, loosen, sharpen, shorten, widen

NOTE
a The ending -ize can also be spelled -ise in British English: centralize/centralise.
b Some adjectives can be used as verbs, e.g. clear, empty.

F Adjectives

Noun + -al: industrial, national, natural, original, traditional
Noun + -ic: artistic, energetic, heroic, photographic
Noun + -ful: careful, hopeful, peaceful, powerful, wonderful > Note a-b
Noun + -less: careless, hopeless, powerless, useless, worthless > Note b
Noun + -ous: courageous, dangerous, famous, luxurious
Noun + -y: greedy, healthy, salty, thirsty, wealthy
Noun + -ly: costly, cowardly, friendly, neighbourly > Note c
Verb + -ive: active, effective, exclusive, informative
Verb + -ing: amusing, exciting, surprising
Verb + -ed: amused, excited, surprised
Verb + -able/-ible: acceptable, eatable, excusable, manageable > Note d

comprehensible, defensible

NOTE
a Nouns with the suffix -ful end in a single l, but the adverb has two. Compare careful and carefully.
b -less is a negative suffix. Hopeless means 'without hope'. Painful and painless are opposites.
c Hourly, daily, weekly, and monthly can be adjectives or adverbs.
d The suffix -able/-ible often means that something can be done.
   This sweater is washable. (= This sweater can be washed.)
   But not all adjectives in -able/-ible have this meaning, e.g. pleasurable (= giving pleasure),
   valuable (= worth a lot), formed from the nouns pleasure and value.

G Adverbs

Many adverbs are formed from an adjective + -ly, e.g. quick ➔ quickly.

4 Vowel and consonant changes

A Sometimes two related words have a different vowel sound.
   We could feel the hot sun on our backs.
   We could feel the heat of the sun on our backs.
   Here hot is an adjective, and heat is a noun.

Other examples are blood ➔ bleed, food ➔ feed, full ➔ fill, lose ➔ loss, proud ➔ pride, sell ➔ sale, shoot ➔ shot, sing ➔ song, sit ➔ seat.
Two related words can have a different consonant sound.

The explanation was hard to believe.
The explanation was beyond belief.
Here believe is a verb, and belief is a noun.

Other examples are advise ➔ advice, descend ➔ descent, prove ➔ proof, speak ➔ speech.

Sometimes there is more than one sound change, e.g. choose ➔ choice, lend ➔ loan, live /lɪv/ ➔ life /laɪf/, succeed ➔ success, think ➔ thought.

5 Words used in more than one way

Many words can be both verbs and nouns.

Verb: Noun:
We had to wait a long time. We had a long wait.
How much will it cost? What about the cost?
Things are going to change around here. I’m going to make some changes.

Here are some common words of this kind.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>aid</th>
<th>claim</th>
<th>drive</th>
<th>hit</th>
<th>plan</th>
<th>support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>answer</td>
<td>control</td>
<td>experience</td>
<td>hope</td>
<td>report</td>
<td>talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attack</td>
<td>cost</td>
<td>fear</td>
<td>love</td>
<td>sound</td>
<td>test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attempt</td>
<td>cut</td>
<td>fight</td>
<td>market</td>
<td>start</td>
<td>vote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>call</td>
<td>deal</td>
<td>form</td>
<td>need</td>
<td>stay</td>
<td>wait</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cause</td>
<td>demand</td>
<td>help</td>
<td>offer</td>
<td>stop</td>
<td>walk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>change</td>
<td>design</td>
<td>help</td>
<td>help</td>
<td>help</td>
<td>help</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sometimes a noun differs from a verb in where the stress goes. Usually the verb is stressed on the second syllable and the noun on the first.

Verb: Noun
The goods are expensive to transport. What transport do you use?
/ˈtrænspɔːt/ /ˈtrænspɔːt/
How is your research progressing? Are you making progress?
/prəˈgresɪŋ/ /ˈprəʊgres/
The change of stress can make a difference to a vowel sound such as in the first syllable of *progress*, which is /prə/ when unstressed and /prəʊ/ when stressed.

Here are some words that are stressed differently as a verb and as a noun.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>conduct</th>
<th>export</th>
<th>produce</th>
<th>rebel</th>
<th>suspect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>conflict</td>
<td>import</td>
<td>progress</td>
<td>record</td>
<td>transfer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discount</td>
<td>increase</td>
<td>protest</td>
<td>reject</td>
<td>transport</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some concrete nouns can also be verbs.

*If you could butter the bread, it would be a help.* (= put butter on)
*The waste was illegally shipped across the Channel.* (= taken by ship)
*We aim to break into the UK bottled water market.* (= put into bottles)

Here are some other verbs formed in this way.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>brake (= apply the brake, slow down)</th>
<th>hand someone their key</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>finger (= touch or feel with your fingers)</td>
<td>mail (= to send by post or by e-mail)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fish (= to try to catch fish)</td>
<td>parcel up a present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>glue (= to stick with glue)</td>
<td>ski down a slope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gun down (= shoot and kill or injure)</td>
<td>(tele)phone a friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hammer a nail in</td>
<td>wallpaper a room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>water the plants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE
Some of these verbs can also have less literal meanings.
*The team got absolutely hammered.* (= badly beaten in a game)

Some adjectives can also be verbs.

*The paint will soon dry.* (= become dry)
*They’re going to free the prisoners.* (= set free)

Some words of this kind are *blind, calm, clear, cool, dry, empty, free, narrow, slow, smooth, warm, wet*.

NOTE
Some adjectives with similar meanings are equivalent to verbs with –en, e.g. *widen*.

### 6 Nationality words

We form nationality words from the name of a country, e.g. *Italy ➔ Italian, France ➔ French, Japan ➔ Japanese*. We can do the same with continents and regions, e.g. *Africa ➔ African, Texas ➔ Texan*. 

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We can use nationality words in the following ways.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>As an adjective</th>
<th>the Italian embassy</th>
<th>Japanese tourists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a Texan oilman</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the name of a language

The President gave his speech in **Italian**.
When did you learn **Japanese**?

For one person or a group

My sister is married to an **Italian**.
Lots of **Japanese** come here on holiday.

For a whole people

(The) **Italians** love their football, don’t they?
**The French** don’t call it ‘the English Channel’.

**NOTE**
We can also refer to a whole people using the adjective + people.
(The) **Italian people** love their football, don’t they?
The **Statue of Liberty** was a gift from the French to the **American people**.

**B**

Many nationality words end in –an, e.g. **American**, **Asian**, **Australian**, **Brazilian**, **Indian**, **Italian**, **Mexican**. We can use them as adjectives or nouns, and we can add –s to the noun.

**the Russian Revolution**  **a Russian** (person)  **the Russians**

Some nationality words end in –ese, e.g. **Chinese**, **Japanese**, **Portuguese**. We can use them as adjectives or nouns, but we cannot add –s to the noun.

**a Chinese** official  **a Chinese** (person)  **the Chinese** (NOT the **Chineses**)

We cannot use a word ending in –ese on its own as a noun.

**The Chinese** have become more open to the West.
(Not **Chinese** have become …)

With some nationalities, the adjective is different from the noun.

**a Polish** student  **a Pole**  **the Poles**

Others are **Danish**, **Dane**, **Finn**, **Finnish**, **Swedish**, **Swede**, and **Turkish**, **Turk**.

Some nouns have a suffix –man /mən/ or –woman.

**a French** magazine  **a Frenchman/a Frenchwoman**

**the French** (NOT the **Frenches**)

Others are **a Dutchman**, **an Englishman**, **an Irishwoman**, **a Scotsman**, and **a Welshman**.

**NOTE**
A nationality word + man is usually written as one word: *an Irishman*. When we use woman, it can usually be written as one word or two: *an Irishwoman/an Irish woman*.

**C**

From Britain we form the adjective **British**, e.g. **the British Isles**. To refer to a person or a group, we can say **a British person** or **some British people**. You may also see **a Brit** or **a Briton**.

**Local people are puzzled by the influx of Britons into the area.**
But **Brit** and **Briton** are rather journalistic. **Brit** is informal.
For the whole people we say *the British*.

*At one time India was ruled by the British.*

C Here are some examples of nationality words.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place name</th>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Whole People</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>African</td>
<td>an African</td>
<td>Africans</td>
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<tr>
<td>America</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>an American</td>
<td>(the) Americans</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>an Asian</td>
<td>Asians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>an Australian</td>
<td>(the) Australians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>British</td>
<td>&gt; C</td>
<td>the British</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>an Englishman/woman</td>
<td>the English</td>
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<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>European</td>
<td>a European</td>
<td>Europeans</td>
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<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>a Frenchman/woman</td>
<td>the French</td>
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<td>Germany</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>a German</td>
<td>(the) Germans</td>
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<td>Greece</td>
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<td>an Indian</td>
<td>(the) Indians</td>
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<td>Ireland</td>
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<td>an Irishman/woman</td>
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<td>(the) Poles</td>
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<td>Scottish</td>
<td>a Scot</td>
<td>(the) Scots</td>
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<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>Swiss</td>
<td>a Swiss</td>
<td>the Swiss</td>
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<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>Turkish</td>
<td>a Turk</td>
<td>(the) Turks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>Welsh</td>
<td>a Welshman/a Welsh woman</td>
<td>the Welsh</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>